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INDIAN PRESS 260

NEW DELHI, INDIA (AP) - THE INDIAN INFORMATION MINISTRY HAS DRAWN UP PLANS TO MERGE THE COUNTRY'S PRIVATE NEWS AGENCIES INTO A SINGLE PRESS SERVICE CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE GOVERNMENT, AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES SAID WEDNESDAY.

THE MINISTRY'S BLUEPRINT FOR COMBINING TWO NATIONAL ENGLISH AGENCIES AND TWO SMALLER HINDI AGENCIES WAS DISTRIBUTED TO EXISTING WIRE SERVICE MANagements AND TRADE UNIONS HOURS AFTER PARLIAMENT WAS TOLD OF THE PROPOSAL.

SOURCES WHO RECEIVED THE DRAFT PLAN FROM INFORMATION MINISTER V.C. SHUKLA SAID HE HAD TOLD THEM HE HOPED THE MERGER PROPOSAL WOULD BE PUT INTO OPERATION BY FEB. 1.

UNDER THE DRAFT PLAN, WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE APPROVED BY PARLIAMENT, THE PRESS SERVICE WOULD BE "AN AUTONOMOUS CORPORATE BODY" WITH THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA AS ITS SENIORMOST OFFICIAL.

ACCORDING TO THE BLUEPRINT, THE PRESIDENT WILL NOMINATE THE CHAIRMAN AND 15 MEMBERS OF THE NEW AGENCY'S FIRST GOVERNING COUNCIL, WHICH WILL BE DRAWN FROM JOURNALISTS, OTHER NEWS PROFESSIONALS AND PROMINENT PUBLIC PERSONS.

BUT THE PLAN SAYS IF THE PRESIDENT "IS SATISFIED THAT THE AGENCY IS NOT FUNCTIONING EFFICIENTLY, HE MAY, AFTER MAKING SUCH INQUIRY AS HE THINKS FIT, REQUIRE THE GOVERNING COUNCIL TO TAKE SUCH MEASURES AS MAY BE APPROPRIATE."

SOURCES SAID THE PROPOSAL GIVES THE GOVERNMENT VIRTUAL CONTROL AND VETO POWER OVER THE AGENCY.

THE GOVERNMENT SAYS THE EXISTING NEWS AGENCIES ARE ECONOMICALLY UNSOUND, WHICH THEY DENY, AND SHOULD BE MERGED INTO A SINGLE FINANCIALLY VIABLE SERVICE.

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